

News Release
U.S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
District of Rhode Island



March 12, 2007

**Four plead guilty in plan
to smuggle guns to Guatemala**

Four illegal aliens have pleaded guilty to possessing guns that they intended to ship to Guatemala. Federal agents arrested the four in November after they bought two rifles, two pistols, and a submachine gun from an undercover Warwick Police detective.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the guilty pleas, which the defendants entered during separate hearings before Chief U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi and U.S. District Court Judge William E. Smith in U.S. District Court, Providence.

Bernardo Rojas, 48, pleaded guilty on March 9, **Vilma Morales**, 40, on February 13, **Carlos Vargas**, 44, on January 31, and **Juan Orellana**, 34, on January 24. Each pleaded guilty to being an illegal alien in possession of firearms. All four have Providence addresses and are detained in federal custody pending sentencing.

At the plea hearings, Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter F. Neronha said that the government could prove that an agent for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives developed information that an illegal alien wanted to buy firearms and ship them to Guatemala. A Warwick detective, working undercover with ATF, arranged a meeting with the alien.

On October 13, the undercover detective met with Vargas, Orellana, and Morales. They ordered a variety of weapons from him: two .22 caliber rifles, a Mac-11 fully automatic submachine gun, and two nine millimeter semi-automatic pistols.

-more-

On November 3, the undercover detective met with Vargas, Orellana, Morales, and Rojas, who was later identified as Morales' husband. The detective sold Vargas two, .22 caliber rifles for \$250. He sold a nine-millimeter pistol to Orellana for \$500. The detective gave a Mac-11 submachine gun to Morales, and Rojas paid him \$425. He then sold Rojas a nine millimeter pistol for \$500.

After the four defendants took possession of the weapons, a team of Immigration and ATF agents arrested them. Further investigation determined that none of the four is a documented alien, that all are from Guatemala, and that they intended to ship the guns to Guatemala.

Orellana is scheduled to appear before Judge Smith for sentencing on April 20; Vargas is scheduled to appear before Judge Lisi on May 4, Morales before Judge Lisi on May 25, and Rojas before Judge Smith on June 1. The maximum penalty for being an illegal alien in possession of a firearm is ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Warwick Police investigated the case. The Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations provided assistance. Assistant U.S. Attorney Neronha is prosecuting it.

-30-

Contact: 401-709-5032

Thomas.connell@usdoj.gov

Find news and information on the U.S. Attorney's Web site:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ri/>